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# **Afghanistan Security: A Government Accountability Office Report**

## **Corrective Actions Are Needed to Address Serious Accountability Concerns about Weapons Provided to Afghan National Security Forces**

**Statement By  
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[Below is an excerpt of the subject report. The full Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report can be viewed at: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09380t.pdf>.]

### **What GAO Found**

Lessons learned from GAO's past work indicate that U.S. strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan should reflect a government wide approach and contain a number of key elements, including clear roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms among government agencies, as well as specific goals, performance measures, and time frames that take into account available resources. Given the heavy commitment of U.S. forces to ongoing operations over the past several years, the availability of forces, equipment, and infrastructure will need to be closely examined in developing plans to re-posture military forces. Finally, in light of future demands on the federal budget, attention will be needed to ensure that U.S. plans are developed and executed in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Clearly, strong oversight by the Congress and senior decision makers will be needed to minimize past problems such as contract mismanagement and insufficient attention to overseeing contractors.

In refining its strategy and plans for the drawdown of forces in Iraq, senior leaders will need to consider several operational factors. For example, the Department of Defense (DOD) will need to develop plans to efficiently and effectively relocate thousands of personnel and billions of dollars worth of equipment out of Iraq, close hundreds of facilities, and determine the role of contractors. Furthermore, the capacity of facilities in Kuwait and other neighboring countries may limit the speed at which equipment and materiel can be moved out of Iraq.

With regard to Afghanistan, DOD will likely face an array of potential challenges related to people, equipment and infrastructure. For example, the availability and training of personnel will be critical considerations as the force is already significantly stressed from ongoing operations and current training capacity has been primarily focused on operations in Iraq. Additionally, the availability of equipment may be limited because the Army and Marine Corps have already deployed much of their equipment to Iraq and much of the prepositioned assets also have been withdrawn to support ongoing operations. Similarly, DOD will need to assess its requirements for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities given its current allocation of these assets to support ongoing operations in Iraq. Further, the ability to transport personnel and equipment into Afghanistan will be challenged by the limited infrastructure and topography of Afghanistan. Moreover, the extent to which contractors will be used to support deployed U.S. forces must be considered as well as how oversight of these contractors will be ensured. Given all of these factors, sound planning based on a well-developed strategy is critical to ensure lessons learned over the years from Iraq are incorporated in Afghanistan and that competing resources are prioritized effectively between both operations.

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During fiscal years 2002 through 2008, the U.S. spent approximately \$16.5 billion to train and equip the Afghan army and police forces in order to transfer responsibility for the security of Afghanistan from the international community to the Afghan government. As part of this effort, Defense, through the U.S. Army and Navy, purchased over 242,000 small arms and light weapons, at a cost of about \$120 million. In addition, the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) has reported that 21 other countries provided about 135,000 weapons for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) between June 2002 and June 2008, which they have valued at about \$103 million. This brings the total number of weapons DOD reported obtaining for ANSF to over 375,000.

CSTC-A in Kabul, which is a joint service, coalition organization under the command and control of DOD's U.S. Central Command is primarily responsible for training and equipping ANSF. As part of that responsibility, CSTC-A receives and stores weapons provided by the U.S. and other international donors and distributes them to ANSF units. In addition, CSTC-A is responsible for monitoring the use of U.S.-procured weapons and other sensitive equipment.

### **Defense Could Not Fully Account for Weapons**

Lapses in weapons accountability occurred throughout the supply chain, including when weapons were obtained, transported to Afghanistan, and stored at two central depots in Kabul. DOD has accountability procedures for its own weapons, including:

- Serial number registration and reporting
- 100 percent physical inventories of weapons stored in depots at least annually

However, DOD failed to provide clear guidance to U.S. personnel regarding what accountability procedures applied when handling weapons obtained for the ANSF. We found that the U.S. Army and CSTC-A did not maintain complete records for an estimated 87,000 or about 36 percent of the 242,000 weapons DOD procured and shipped to Afghanistan for ANSF. Specifically:

- For about 46,000 weapons, the Army could not provide us serial numbers to uniquely identify each weapon provided, which made it impossible for us to determine their location or disposition.
- For about 41,000 weapons with serial numbers recorded, CSTC-A did not have any records of their location or disposition. Furthermore, CSTC-A did not maintain reliable records, including serial numbers, for any of the 135,000 weapons it reported obtaining from international donors from June 2002 through June 2008.

Although weapons were in DOD's control and custody until they were issued to ANSF units, accountability was compromised during transportation and storage. Organizations involved in the transport of U.S.-procured weapons into Kabul by air did not communicate adequately to ensure that accountability was maintained over weapons during transport. In addition, CSTC-A did not maintain complete and accurate inventory records for weapons at the central storage depots and allowed poor security to persist. Until July 2008, CSTC-A did not track all weapons at the depots by serial number and conduct routine physical inventories. Without such regular inventories, it is difficult for CSTC-A to maintain accountability for weapons at the depots and detect weapons losses. Moreover, CSTC-A could not identify and respond to incidents of actual or potential compromise, including suspected pilferage, due to poor security and unreliable data systems. Illustrating the importance of physical inventories, less than one month after completing its first full weapons inventory, CSTC-A officials identified the theft of 47 pistols intended for ANSF.

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During our review, DOD indicated that it would begin recording serial numbers for all weapons it obtains for ANSF, and CSTC-A established procedures to track weapons by serial number in Afghanistan. It also began conducting physical inventories of the weapons stored at the central depots. However, CSTC-A officials stated that their continued implementation of these new accountability procedures was not guaranteed, considering staffing constraints and other factors.

Despite CSTC-A training efforts, ANSF units cannot fully safeguard and account for weapons, placing weapons CSTC-A has provided to ANSF at serious risk of theft or loss. In February 2008, CSTC-A acknowledged that it was issuing equipment to Afghan National Police units before providing training on accountability practices and ensuring that effective controls were in place. Recognizing the need for weapons accountability in ANSF units, DOD and Department of State (DOS) deployed hundreds of U.S. trainers and mentors to, among other things, help the Afghan army and police establish equipment accountability practices. In June 2008, DOD reported to Congress that it was CSTC-A's policy not to issue equipment to ANSF without verifying that appropriate supply and accountability procedures are in place. While CSTC-A has established a system for assessing the logistics capacity of ANSF units, it has not consistently assessed or verified ANSF's ability to properly account for weapons and other equipment. Contractors serving as mentors have reported major ANSF accountability weaknesses. Although these reports did not address accountability capacities in a consistent manner that would allow a systematic or comprehensive assessment of all units, they highlighted the following common problems relating to weapons accountability.

- Lack of functioning property book operations. Many Afghan army and police units did not properly maintain property books, which are fundamental tools used to establish equipment accountability and are required by Afghan ministerial decrees.
- Illiteracy. Widespread illiteracy among Afghan army and police personnel substantially impaired equipment accountability. For example, a mentor noted that illiteracy in one Afghan National Army corps was directly interfering with the ability of supply section personnel to implement property accountability processes and procedures, despite repeated training efforts.
- Poor security. Some Afghan National Police units did not have facilities adequate to ensure the physical security of weapons and protect them against theft in a high-risk environment. In a northern province, for example, a contractor reported that the arms room of one police district office was behind a wooden door that had only a miniature padlock, and that this represented the same austere conditions as in the other districts.
- Unclear guidance. Afghan government logistics policies were not always clear to Afghan army and police property managers. Approved Ministry of Interior policies outlining material accountability procedures were not widely disseminated, and many police logistics officers did not recognize any of the logistical policies as rule. Additionally, a mentor to the Afghan National Army told us that despite new Ministry of Defense decrees on accountability, logistics officers often carried out property accountability functions using Soviet-style accounting methods and that the Ministry was still auditing army accounts against those defunct standards.

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- Corruption. Reports of alleged theft and unauthorized resale of weapons are common, including one case in which an Afghan police battalion commander in one province was allegedly selling weapons to enemy forces.
  - Desertion. Desertion in the Afghan National Police has also resulted in the loss of weapons. For example, contractors reported that Afghan Border Police officers at one province checkpoint deserted to ally themselves with enemy forces and took all their weapons and two vehicles with them.

In July 2007, DOD began issuing night vision devices to the Afghan National Army. These devices are considered dangerous to the public and U.S. forces in the wrong hands, and DOD guidance calls for intensive monitoring of their use, including tracking by serial number. However, we found that CSTC-A did not begin monitoring the use of these sensitive devices until October 2008—about fifteen months after issuing them. DOD and CSTC-A attributed the limited monitoring of these devices to a number of factors, including a shortage of security assistance staff and expertise at CSTC-A, exacerbated by frequent CSTC-A staff rotations. After we brought this to CSTC-A's attention, it conducted an inventory and reported in December 2008 that all but 10 of the 2,410 night vision devices issued had been accounted for.

We previously reported that DOD cited significant shortfalls in the number of trainers and mentors as the primary impediment to advancing the capabilities of ANSF. According to CSTC-A officials, as of December 2008, CSTC-A had only 64 percent of the nearly 6,700 personnel it required to perform its overall mission, including only about half of the over 4,000 personnel needed to mentor ANSF units.

In summary, we have serious concerns about the accountability for weapons that DOD obtained for ANSF through U.S. procurements and international donations. First, we estimate that DOD did not systematically track over half of the weapons intended for ANSF. This was primarily due to staffing shortages and DOD's failure to establish clear accountability procedures for these weapons while they were still in U.S. custody and control. Second, ANSF units could not fully safeguard and account for weapons DOD has issued to them, despite accountability training provided by both DOD and DOS. Poor security and corruption in Afghanistan, unclear guidance from Afghan ministries, and a shortage of trainers and mentors to help ensure that appropriate accountability procedures are implemented have reportedly contributed to this situation.

In the report we are releasing today we make several recommendations to help improve accountability for weapons and other sensitive equipment that the United States provided to ANSF. In particular, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense:

- Establish clear accountability procedures for weapons while they are in the control and custody of the U.S., including tracking all weapons by serial number and conducting routine physical inventories
- Direct CSTC-A to specifically assess and verify each ANSF unit's capacity to safeguard and account for weapons and other sensitive equipment before providing such equipment, unless a specific waiver or exception is granted
- Devote adequate resources to CSTC-A's effort to train, mentor, and assess ANSF in equipment accountability matters

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In commenting on a draft of our report, Defense concurred with our recommendations and has begun to take corrective action.

- In January 2009, Defense directed the Defense Security Cooperation Agency to lead an effort to establish a weapons registration and monitoring system in Afghanistan, consistent with controls mandated by Congress for weapons provided to Iraq. If Defense follows through on this plan and, in addition, clearly requires routine inventories of weapons in U.S. custody and control, our concern about the lack of clear accountability procedures will be largely addressed.
- According to Defense, trainers and mentors are assessing the ability of ANSF units to safeguard and account for weapons. For the Afghan National Army, mentors are providing oversight at all levels of command of those units receiving weapons. For the Afghan National Police, most weapons are issued to units that have received instruction on equipment accountability as part of newly implemented training programs. We note that at the time of our review, ANSF unit assessments did not systematically address each unit's capacity to safeguard and account for weapons in its possession. We also note that DOD has cited significant shortfalls in the number of personnel required to train and mentor ANSF units. Unless these matters are addressed, we are not confident the shortcomings we reported will be adequately addressed.
- DOD also indicated that it is looking into ways of addressing the staffing shortfalls that hamper CSTC-A's efforts to train, mentor, and assess ANSF in equipment accountability matters. However, Defense did not state how or when additional staffing would be provided.